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Summary record of the 13th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Thursday, 25 October 2012, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Mr. Felopoulos (Vice-Chair) ..... (Greece)
later: Mr. Messone (Chair) ..... (Gabon)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Agenda item 55: Questions relating to information (*continued*) (A/67/21 and A/67/307)

1. **Mr. O'Brien** (India) welcomed both the Secretary-General's report on "Questions relating to information" (A/67/307) and that of the Committee on Information (A/67/21). It was heartening to see that the Department of Public Information had collaborated with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Field Support in organizing a training workshop and an event to mark the International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers. The Department of Public Information should pursue those collaborative efforts to raise awareness of United Nations activities, such as the work carried out, often under extremely demanding circumstances, by United Nations peacekeepers in strife-torn lands.

2. The United Nations information centres played a crucial role in enhancing the public image of the United Nations and disseminating information, particularly in developing countries. The centres acted as an interface between the United Nations and local communities and should be strengthened further. His delegation urged the Department of Public Information to work closely with host countries in those efforts and supported the provision of adequate budgetary resources to ensure that information centres functioned effectively and also increased their collaboration with local community groups.

3. While it was important to capitalize on new information technology and social media to reach new audiences, it was also important to use the widest range of communication methods, from webcasts and podcasts to traditional means of communication such as radio, television and the print media. In the developing world in particular, radio was a major source of information and there was a need to raise awareness of its importance and enhance international cooperation to improve and diversify the content of radio broadcasts.

4. The Department was to be commended for its activities under the United Nations Academic Impact (UNAI) initiatives, in which it interacted with institutions of higher learning in order to strengthen United Nations ties with different global constituencies. UNAI events were an excellent example of creativity and innovation in advancing the goals of the United Nations. India had always been a committed contributor to UNAI and had recently co-sponsored an event as part of the "Unlearning Intolerance" programme. The United Nations had designated the University of Calcutta as an Academic Hub to develop expertise in peace and conflict-resolution studies.

5. **Mr. Orellana** (Guatemala) welcomed the two reports before the Committee, noting that the Department of Public Information played a vitally important role in publicizing and promoting the Organization's multiple activities and goals in an objective and impartial manner.

6. While his delegation recognized the importance of the new technologies and welcomed their use by the Department, it viewed with concern the digital divide that currently existed between developing and developed countries. The fact that many countries did not have access to the new technologies meant that traditional means of communication, such as radio, television and the print media, must be preserved. Since they remained the only way for many developing countries to obtain information, traditional media should also transmit information in as many languages as possible. Multilingualism was fundamental to the very existence of the United Nations and it was essential that there should be parity among the six official languages. The Department should give serious consideration to ways of reducing the linguistic divide that existed within the Organization.

7. His delegation welcomed the close cooperation between the Department of Public Information and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, which helped to increase understanding of peacekeeping missions. He was encouraged that the Department of Public Information was continuing to improve its dissemination of information, particularly in troop-contributing countries, on the multidimensional nature of peacekeeping operations.

8. Everyone had an obligation to protect the rights of freedom of the press and of expression, which not only empowered peoples but also forced authorities to be more accountable for their actions. Those rights must be exercised responsibly, within the parameters established by national laws and the relevant international instruments.

9. **Mr. Diaz Bartolome** (Argentina) commended the efforts made by the Department of Public Information

to develop new contents and use new technologies, while continuing to prioritize traditional means of communication. The work of the United Nations information centres should also continue to be supported, as they were key elements in disseminating the Organization's message. Argentina especially welcomed the work done by the Information Centre in Buenos Aires, which had been very active in the past year, organizing events and helping journalists produce news and special reports on the work of the United Nations and the specialized agencies.

10. His delegation supported the commitment of the Department to multilingualism, but was concerned that, once again, there was no mention of it in the Secretary-General's report, especially when the need for parity among the six official languages had been recognized. Information and disaggregated statistics on that issue should be provided, as had been the case in previous reports. Nor was any information provided on the use of local languages by information centres or the percentage of visits by language to the United Nations website.

11. While his delegation was pleased that the Department had expanded its use of social networks in all the official languages, it should always be remembered that such resources complemented the United Nations website, rather than replacing it, and were not therefore a solution to its increasing linguistic imbalance.

12. His Government was proud that the Universidad Nacional de Córdoba had been the first university in Latin America to enter into a cooperation agreement to expand and improve a range of the Department's online material, and it supported efforts to develop such cooperation with other academic institutions.

13. In terms of visits by language, the United Nations website in Spanish had again come second (15 per cent), after English (65 per cent). However, his delegation was concerned that there was far less content on the Spanish site than on the English one. The Department should be guided by its own statistics and adjust the linguistic content of the website to actual public demand. The same approach should be taken to United Nations webcasts, where coverage of the Main Committees was currently available in English only. He assumed that there would be no additional cost in providing webcasts in all six official languages, since all Main Committee meetings already had interpretation coverage. He made some practical suggestions as to how that situation might be rectified without causing any disruption.

14. **Ms. Tambunan** (Indonesia) noted that the Department of Public Information had used new media platforms to disseminate information on key issues. She urged the Organization to enhance its strategy in that regard, especially to reach young people. Traditional media still played a pivotal role in many parts of the world, however, and such media should continue to be used in communicating the work of the United Nations to the public. Efforts must also be made to narrow the digital divide and enhance cooperation in order to give people greater access to information. Because the media could be the messengers of either peace and tolerance or misunderstanding and hatred, the Department had a responsibility to make the global mass media aware of the need to project a culture of peace and tolerance and to combat prejudice and stereotyping.

15. It was essential to continue to raise international awareness concerning the question of Palestine with a view to supporting efforts to achieve a just and lasting peace in the Middle East. She acknowledged the contribution made by the Department to publicizing the issue through the United Nations website and through its annual training programme for Palestinian media professionals and encouraged the Department to continue its work in that area, including by organizing activities to mark the annual International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.

16. As a troop-contributing country, Indonesia welcomed the ongoing cooperation between the Department of Public Information, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Field Support in publicizing the work of peacekeepers, which would enhance the public image of the United Nations and the effectiveness of peacekeeping missions. United Nations information centres could also play an important role in communicating information about peacekeeping operations to vast populations around the world. The work of the Peacebuilding Commission should likewise be made known to the public.

17. The use of all official languages in United Nations publications and the publication of United Nations documents in non-official languages were

crucial for reaching the widest possible audience; efforts to that end were to be applauded.

18. **Mr. Sahraei** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that the most important mission of the Department of Public Information should be to provide accurate, impartial and timely information to the public on the tasks and responsibilities of the United Nations, in order to strengthen international support for its activities. Since the Committee on Information played an important role in examining United Nations public information policies and activities, closer cooperation with the Department was needed.

19. He commended the Secretariat's role in organizing the commemoration of the International Day of Nowruz on 22 March 2012, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 64/253, and encouraged the Department to continue to promote awareness of the event.

20. The revolution in information and communication technology had greatly increased the possibilities for disseminating and sharing information and knowledge, but there was a widening gap between developed and developing countries. It was regrettable that certain developed countries, taking advantage of their monopoly of modern communication technology, were constantly trying to distort facts and fabricate events, especially in relation to developing countries.

21. In an unjustifiable move, certain Western countries had decided to impose a ban on the broadcasting of 19 Iranian satellite television and radio channels in Europe. His Government strongly condemned that action, which was a clear violation of international law and a flagrant contradiction of any claims to be defending freedom of speech and freedom of the press. It urged the countries concerned to respect the principles of freedom and democracy and to take immediate action to reverse their decision. It also called upon the relevant United Nations organs, especially the Department of Public Information, to protect the right to freedom of opinion and expression.

22. Given the serious deterioration in the humanitarian and economic situation of the innocent Palestinian people, the Department had an important responsibility to raise international awareness regarding the question of Palestine.

23. His delegation called upon the Department to use its worldwide presence to foster respect for all religions and cultural values. Promoting dialogue among civilizations and cultures would greatly increase mutual understanding and DPI should promote that concept in the activities of the United Nations in various fields.

24. The 63 United Nations information centres around the world were the real interface between the United Nations and the international community and had a crucial role to play in enhancing the Organization's public image. Better coordination between the centres and host countries, the provision of new information and communication technologies and the allocation of adequate resources to them, as well as careful attention to the cultural, social and economic characteristics of different regions, were all elements that should be taken duly into account.

25. His delegation fully supported efforts to create a linguistically more equal world, with information disseminated not only in the official languages of the United Nations but also in those local languages that were widely regarded as the roots of great cultures and civilizations, including Persian, which was a unique source of integrity and solidarity among several nations.

26. **Mr. Rabiu** (Nigeria) encouraged the Department of Public Information to continue its laudable work of disseminating information about the work of the United Nations all over the world. That would no doubt require greater deployment of resources, especially in the area of information and communication technology (ICT). In that area, the Department should take into account the varying degree of development of ICT use between developing and developed countries and should not suddenly abandon more traditional means of communication, such as radio.

27. His delegation noted with satisfaction the role played by the Department in creating awareness of the Rio+20 Summit, as demonstrated by the increased participation of a number of major stakeholders across the developing world, the high volume of media coverage of the Summit and the intense online discussions on it on United Nations social media platforms. The Department had also worked with Nigeria on launching the Millennium Development Goals 2012 awareness-raising initiative and had helped raise awareness of and support for the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) through its "Africa Renewal" programme.

28. As a troop-contributing country, Nigeria stressed the importance of the work done by the Department to promote awareness of United Nations peacekeeping operations. Close cooperation was needed between the Department of Public Information and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations.

29. **Mr. Ri Kwang Nam** (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) said that, while some countries were cooperating in the area of public information, others were taking advantage of the latest communication technology to spread their values and alien lifestyle to other countries and even instigate regime change. The so-called "Radio Free Asia" was one such example. The United States of America was using all forms of government-controlled mass media to launch large-scale psychological warfare intended to cause internal unrest and overturn the systems of sovereign States, under the disguise of "freedom of speech".

30. Such acts constituted a grave violation of the United Nations Charter and other relevant international laws defining the principle of respect for sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs. International public information activities should serve the sound social development of each country and the building of relations among States. United Nations Member States should observe the principle of impartiality and objectivity and strongly reject the base political objectives pursued by some countries using government-controlled public information media.

31. The ever-widening gap between developed and developing countries in their level of ICT development was also cause for concern. Since ICT development remained in the hands of a small number of countries, those countries had a responsibility to assist developing countries by taking such measures as the transfer of modern ICT.

32. **Mr. Alzayani** (Bahrain) said that the Department of Public Information had played an important role in conveying the image of the United Nations to people everywhere and providing information about its activities and the hopes and aspirations of the international community. It had raised awareness about such important events and issues as the Rio+20 Summit, the Millennium Development Goals, International Women's Day and Nelson Mandela International Day. The United Nations information centres were also important for disseminating information and organizing United Nations-related activities and events.

33. Since the Department was the voice of the United Nations in the world, there must be parity among the Organization's six official languages in all its discussions and information materials, which, so far as possible, should also include other non-official languages.

34. He stressed the importance of traditional media for providing information and raising public awareness about the United Nations, especially in developing countries, where state-of-the-art media were often not available. The proposal for an annual World Radio Day was an indication of that importance. The "new, more just and more effective world information and communication order" called for by General Assembly resolution 34/182 might be achieved when it became possible to narrow the digital divide between developing and developed countries.

35. He urged the Department to continue its information activities under the special information programme on the question of Palestine until a just solution to that question was achieved.

36. **Mr. Valero Briceño** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) said that his delegation, while appreciating the work done by the Department in promoting a wider understanding of the aims and achievements of the United Nations, believed that such work would be more representative if its message were disseminated in all six official languages of the Organization.

37. Recalling that the Seventh Conference of Ministers of Information of Non-Aligned Countries, held in Venezuela in July 2008, had reaffirmed the commitment to build a development-oriented information society, his delegation observed with concern the digital divide between developed and developing countries. The Isla Margarita Declaration adopted at the Conference had called for the adoption of measures to democratize the use of ICT for the benefit of all peoples, in particular those from developing countries.

38. Venezuela was concerned about the biased campaigns launched by powerful international communication media, in the service of capital and imperial Powers, which distorted the realities of developing countries. Those campaigns were being used for propaganda purposes and did nothing to

promote respect for sovereignty, peace and solidarity among nations. Information media inaccurately described as "independent" demanded freedom of expression but infringed it daily. Communication media could be highly positive if placed at the service of social justice, truth, respect for cultural diversity and brotherhood among peoples, but they were harmful if used to perpetuate backwardness and ignorance and reinforce neo-colonial domination.

39. There was full and unrestricted freedom of expression in Venezuela. Public criticism and the discussion of ideas occurred freely, as could be seen from the recent election.

40. Like other developing countries, Venezuela was making progress in creating its own sovereign information and communication networks. The Simón Bolivar satellite, in orbit since October 2008, facilitated access to and the transmission of data via the Internet, telephone and television, meeting national telecommunications needs, particularly in remote regions. The new Miranda observation satellite, launched that month, would facilitate national planning in such areas as agriculture, urban development, industry, environment and water resources and monitor climate and the country's borders. It would also strengthen Latin American and Caribbean integration, in that the countries of the region could sign science and outer space cooperation agreements with Venezuela.

41. In 2009, digital telecommunications had been introduced in Venezuelan schools through the Conaima information technology education project, while since 2007 the Infocentros programme had been bringing the Internet to a wider public in order to develop local potential, social networks and people's power. The Bolivarian Revolution was promoting the creation of alternative and community means of communication in order to democratize access to information and raise the population's intellectual, cultural and educational level. Venezuela was ready to cooperate with the Department to promote the best causes of the peoples of the world.

42. **Mr. Uspenskiy** (Russian Federation) said that, as the Organization's volume of work grew, so too did its public information activities. In a context of limited resources, it was important to maximize coordination among the different offices of the United Nations so that information campaigns did not duplicate, but rather complemented, each other and to ensure that they used language that would be understood by all target audiences.

43. The key focus of public information activities should be to promote the universal human values on which the United Nations had been founded and publicize its efforts to achieve social progress, equality and justice. It was also important to preserve the historical memory of the Second World War and the lessons learned from it, particularly as one of the founding purposes of the United Nations had been to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war. It was a matter of concern that racial, ethnic and religious intolerance was on the increase in a number of countries, along with contemporary forms of Nazism, in many cases encouraged by the authorities.

44. Public information activities on the work of the United Nations required a balanced approach, using both new and traditional media. The principle of multilingualism should be respected and information should be adapted to each country and region. The Department's network of information centres had long proved their effectiveness in publicizing the Organization's work, the United Nations Information Centre in Moscow being a good example. His delegation welcomed the Department's efforts to develop television and radio broadcasting and to use digital Internet-based means of disseminating information. Russian-language output from United Nations Radio and the United Nations News Centre had traditionally been in high demand in many countries. The significant progress made in implementing the principle of multilingualism on the Organization's website, and in increasing the amount of information available and updating its format, was helping to attract a wider and younger audience.

45. Engaging with young people was one of the most important aspects of the Organization's public information work. His delegation was therefore pleased to note that the Global Model United Nations conferences had become truly global events and that the Academic Impact initiative was becoming increasingly popular. The values of the United Nations could also be promoted through a variety of international youth forums, such as the World University Games to be held in Kazan in 2013 and the Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games to be held in Sochi in 2014.

46. **Mr. Kogda** (Burkina Faso) said that the revolution in information and communication technologies offered immense potential for enhancing economic growth and social development and could play an important role in eliminating poverty in developing countries. For that reason, the various actors must intensify their efforts to close the digital divide between developed and developing countries and promote improved access to the new technologies for countries of the South, particularly in Africa. However, the new technologies should not be promoted to the detriment of traditional means of communication, notably radio, television and the print media, all of which should be supported.

47. His delegation welcomed the UNESCO proclamation of 13 February as World Radio Day, which would help draw the international community's attention to an irreplaceable communication tool that reached people in the most isolated parts of the world.

48. United Nations information centres played a valuable role in disseminating information and bringing the United Nations closer to the public. Burkina Faso had been host to one such centre in Ouagadougou for several decades; that centre also covered Chad, Mali and the Niger and played a vital warning and advocacy role on the specific concerns of those four countries, including poverty reduction, food security and natural disasters. It had also produced and disseminated information in several of the region's national languages.

49. The Committee on Information, which played an important role in the formulation of United Nations information policies and activities, should continue to support the capacity-building of information centres, particularly in developing countries. His delegation reiterated its appeal for increased human, material and budgetary resources for the Ouagadougou information centre to enable it to maintain and expand its activities.

50. **Mr. Sharaf** (Egypt) said that his delegation appreciated the efforts made by the Department in recent months to clarify the role of the United Nations with regard to substantive issues such as the question of Palestine, international development goals, nuclear non- proliferation, climate change, sustainable development, NEPAD, peacekeeping and UN-Women. It commended the Secretary-General's creative community outreach initiative, aimed at offering assistance to cinema and television professionals interested in producing features on issues relating to the work of the Organization, and reaffirmed its support for the Secretariat's efforts to find ways to bring together the United Nations and the entertainment industry with a view to mobilizing public opinion on global issues. It urged the holding of events in the Arab region and Africa for that purpose.

51. The Organization's increasing responsibility for strengthening international cooperation in the area of information, bridging the knowledge divide and establishing a more just and more objective world information order meant that the Department must constantly develop and update United Nations information activities in order to keep up with the spirit of the times, help disseminate reliable information and promote a culture of peace and tolerance.

52. While it supported the use of some United Nations information centres for publicizing the Organization's work via popular media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, his delegation felt that there was a need for greater emphasis on radio, which remained one of the most widely appreciated services in developing countries, especially in rural and remote areas, and specifically on programmes broadcast in Arabic to Africa and the Middle East.

53. His delegation reaffirmed the importance of multilingualism, including on the Internet, and of striking a proper balance among the Organization's six official languages to permit the widest possible dissemination of information and promote dialogue and understanding among cultures. It looked forward to the continuing enhancement of the quality and content of the Department's coverage, within a framework characterized by focus, neutrality and the ability to influence, and to greater integration between DPI activities at Headquarters and the growing activities of information centres around the world. It reiterated its call for a stronger role for the main information centres in Cairo, Mexico City and Pretoria, closer cooperation between them and the national centres in their respective regions, expansion of the Organization's public information structure and enhancement of the level of work, especially in developing and least developed countries and conflict areas.

54. On the Organization's website, there were still some speed constraints in all six official languages and every effort should be made to simplify searches.

55. His delegation appreciated the ongoing efforts made by the Department to develop and update its methods for disseminating the United Nations message and supporting the Organization in achieving its purposes. It encouraged the Department to continue its programmes and activities on economic and social development in Member States, especially in Africa. It emphasized the importance of the Department's activities aimed at helping to bring about a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East through the dissemination of information that faithfully reported developments on the ground and United Nations efforts to end the Israeli occupation of Arab lands occupied since 1967, enable the Palestinian people to establish an independent State with East Jerusalem as its capital and secure Israel's withdrawal from all occupied Syrian and Lebanese territory in accordance with the relevant international terms of reference, including the Arab peace initiative. In that connection, there should be greater focus on the current Palestinian bid for United Nations membership.

56. **Mr. Makanga** (Gabon), noting that there were still 16 Non-Self-Governing Territories in the world, said that it was vital that the United Nations step up its efforts to fill any information and training gaps in those Territories in order to permit their economic and social progress. His delegation praised the Department's activities in that regard and encouraged it to continue working with the administering Powers to that end.

57. At the same time, his delegation acknowledged the cross-cutting work done by the Department in all areas of United Nations activity and particularly encouraged the Department's initiatives with regard to sustainable development, climate change and the Millennium Development Goals. Like other African countries, Gabon was concerned that the Department should communicate complete and factual information on the conflict situations that were destroying peace and security in Africa.

58. His delegation welcomed the efforts that the Department was making to ensure equal and fair treatment for all the official languages of the United Nations. That was not only a legal requirement, but also strengthened the dialogue of cultures and civilizations among Member States.

59. He thanked the Department for helping to promote International Widows' Day, an initiative that would contribute to United Nations action to combat discrimination and violence against women. Lastly, his Government had made commendable efforts to bridge the digital divide and improve media access and was eager to develop its cooperation with the Department to that end.

60. *Mr. Messone (Gabon) (Chair) took the Chair.*

61. **Ms. Herity** (Secretary of the Committee) said that under the terms of operative paragraph 20 of draft resolution B relating to United Nations public information policies and activities, the General Assembly had reiterated its request to the Secretary-General to ensure that the Department of Public Information had appropriate staffing capacity in all the official languages of the United Nations to undertake all its activities and to include that aspect in future programme budget proposals for the Department, bearing in mind the principle of parity of all six official languages, while respecting the workload in each official language.

62. She drew the Committee's attention to the provisions of section VI of General Assembly resolution 45/248 B, in which the Assembly had reaffirmed that the Fifth Committee was the appropriate Main Committee of the Assembly entrusted with responsibilities for administrative and budgetary matters and reaffirmed also the role of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions.

63. It was envisaged that adoption of paragraph 20 would not entail any additional appropriation under the programme budget for the biennium 2012-2013. However, bearing in mind the principle of parity of all six official languages in the activities undertaken by the Department of Public Information while respecting the workload in each official language, additional financial implications were envisaged for 2014-2015 and were expected to be reviewed in the context of the budget for the biennium 2014-2015, in accordance with established budgetary procedures.

Action on draft resolutions contained in the Report of the Committee on Information

64. **The Chair** invited the Committee to take a decision on draft resolution A, entitled "Information in the service of humanity", contained in chapter IV, paragraph 38, of document A/67/21 and draft resolution B, entitled "United Nations public

information policies and activities", contained in the same document, as well as the draft decision on page 26 of the English text. He recalled that the Committee on Information had adopted the two draft resolutions and the draft decision by consensus.

65. If he heard no objection, he would take it that the Committee agreed to take a decision on draft resolutions A and B and the draft decision jointly.

66. *It was so decided.*

67. **The Chair** said that, if he heard no objection, he would take it that the Committee agreed to adopt draft resolutions A and B and the draft decision without a vote.

68. *Draft resolutions A and B and the draft decision contained in document A/67/21 were adopted.*

The meeting rose at 5 p.m.